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Live images flashed on the large video monitors at Lake County's new transportation management center, showing traffic at some of the county's most congested intersections. At 10 a.m. Monday, traffic seemed to be flowing smoothly. But that wasn't the case a few hours earlier, as rush hour can make navigating many of the intersections a nightmare for motorists. The new transportation center uses fiber optic technology, computers and cameras to control major stop lights in the county in an effort to reduce traffic backups at the intersections. In addition to more green lights for motorists, the high-tech transportation system will provide up-to-date information to the public on problem intersections and give police valuable information about traffic accidents, officials say.

"This will put Lake County on the cutting edge of traffic-flow technology," said U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk, R-10th, who worked to secure about \$3.6 million in federal funding for the \$6.8 million project.

The center, located in Libertyville, has 12 large video monitors on a main wall, surrounded by many smaller computer terminals, that display live footage of major county intersections. A digital weather map on the wall also forecasts adverse weather conditions.

Each of the intersections are equipped with cameras that feed live information back to the control center where traffic engineers monitor traffic and can change the timing of lights to reduce backups. The system can also alert engineers to signal malfunctions.

"A lot of the traffic congestion at intersections is caused by a malfunction or a traffic signal not operating properly, and this will be able to tell us which signals have failed so we will be able to correct them more quickly," said Lake County Traffic Engineer Tony Khawaja.

The county will also be providing travel information on radio station 1620 AM with updates on accident locations, congested intersections, weather and road conditions, construction work and detour routes. A companion Web site with regular traffic updates is expected to be on line in the near future at www.co.lake.il.us/dot.

"The best thing we do can to alleviate traffic congestion is to give information to motorists so they can choose alternate routes or go at different times," said Mike Scott, one of the traffic center operators.

The center also sends information to Lake County's 911 emergency center, which can assist police in better coordinating response to accidents.

By this spring, 150 county and state traffic signals are expected to be connected to the new network, and long-term plans are to connect all of the county's 661 traffic signals to the system, said Lake County Transportation Director Martin Buehler.

Traffic signals on Milwaukee Avenue from Aptakisic Road to state Route 137 and on Aptakisic Road from Buffalo Grove Road to Milwaukee Avenue are already connected. Stop lights along U.S. Route 41, Rollins Road, Washington Street, Stearns School Road, state Route 137 and Grand Avenue are scheduled to be brought on-line in the near future.